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WHAT TO DO WITH CIVILIZATION.
IT IS UGLY — BEAUTIFY IT

A SERMON
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Being the fourth of a series of six sermons which seek to set forth the present status and needs of civilization as viewed by six sets of counselors.

"It is Impossible—Get Rid of It."
"It is Bad—Moralize It."
"It is Ignorant, Vulgar—Teach, Cultivate It."
"It is Ugly—Beautify It."
"It is Poor—Materialize It."
"It is Material—Spiritualize It."

What to do with Civilization.

It is Ugly—Beautify it

WE HAVE noted what those have for us who say that we should get rid of the sorry scheme of things entire or slip out from under it and get away. Others we found who counsel us that the difficulty is in our human relations. There is a way to walk in this kind of world and an attitude to take towards others of our kind. This is the moral order. Civilization can get better just as rapidly as men learn to walk in this way; cease to do evil and learn to do well. Then we listened to those who say that the difficulty is that men do not know; they should be taught. Man comes into the world the most ignorant of beings; the need is for cultivation of the mind, sweetness and light.

Three words are often upon the lips of the wise in all ages: goodness, truth and beauty. Those who would moralize civilization say, give it goodness. Those who would teach it say, give it knowledge. Others are impressed most with another need. They say it is not the badness of the thing that strikes them first, nor the ignorance of the thing but the ugliness of the thing. Civilization outrages them with its ugliness. We should have goodness, truth, and with them, beauty.

"He hath made every thing beautiful in its time." See the world about us given us to live in; see the roof of our habitation, the over-arching sky, with its

varied coverings made by sun, clouds and stars at dawn, noon, evening and night. See the floor of man's world dotted with brightest things, changing with the day and season. Let man look up, down, out, wherever he will—all beautiful. All of man's world about him says that He who made it is not a moralist alone, sternly calling men to righteousness; not a schoolmaster alone, crying, "Get wisdom; get understanding"; says that He is artist, too, rioting in form and color, saying, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." Man comes into this kind of world with his God-given power of choice. As he can be moral and chooses not to be; chooses evil: can choose knowledge, but does not; chooses to be ignorant: so, he can choose to be beautiful, but does not; chooses to be ugly. Put man into this world with the responsibility of picking his way as he goes and he may choose to be not only the worst being and the most ignorant being, but also the most unsightly being.

Those who feel the ugliness of civilization most point out to us that other beings here in the world fit into the beautiful order. They do not mar or waste the world as they use it, neither do they destroy its comeliness. They ask us to look at the life about us, crawling on leaf and bark, on the desert, northern ice and in the tropic wilderness. Shell, skin, feather, fur and scale, all take the color of their world about them; fit into it and harmonize with it. Earth, the landscape, ocean and sky are not made ugly but more beautiful by these living things, crawling, running, swimming and flying about. They do not outrage the world with their ugliness. Man alone has an

ash pile; burns the world with fire and gives ashes for beauty. They ask us to go with them to the mountains where God's world as it came from His hands is most untouched. Here are the woods, running streams, flower fringed and little touches of color on every ledge. Above all, the snow-covered peaks with glaciers flashing in the sun. Here and there is a human habitation in the midst of this beautiful world. It would seem a hard choice to make but they have made it; have chosen to be the only unsightly thing that is not up to surroundings. Man is the only blot on the landscape. The only ugly things are his world, his person, the clothes that cover him and the house that he has built. They ask us to go with them to the great centers where men exhibit the flowers and fruits they have perfected; the animals they have bred, and the things they have made with their hands. Is the exhibitor, the man himself, as fair and beautiful to look upon as the flowers and the fruit he has perfected; the animal he leads and the handiwork he has made?

Men with seeing eyes came along who saw this: the beauty of the world and man's ugliness in the midst of it but not up to it. They said that the first thing is to see the world for they are as men with eyes holden; they have not seen the world yet. Men have tasted the world; they know it is good to eat. They have felt the world soft, soothing and sheltering to their touch; they know the feel of it. But the world is not only to be tasted and felt, it is to be seen also. Here is a new experience to be had, something that comes later in time and in the scale of human advance.

Things surely are not made in all these forms and colors for nothing. The demands of utility and survival value do not call for all this lavish decoration. Things meant to be tasted and felt only would not be so curiously wrought and touched. Things need not be beautiful to taste good or feel good. The beauty of the world indicates something else, some other uses. As food, the world has found us; the outside world has answered to something calling from within. So the world as something to be felt has found us. The beauty of the world, too, was made to find us. We have that within us which, awakened, will call to the world without and the beauty of the world will answer and supply it just as food answers and supplies our hunger. What the world as beauty can do to us it has not done as yet, for we have not seen it. We must open our eyes and see the world just as we open our mouths to taste it and reach out our hands to feel it.

This is the gospel according to John Ruskin, a man called of God to open men's eyes to the world given them to live in. From the writers of the Psalms, who did see the handiwork of God, up to the time of Jesus, who did behold the flowers of the field, not very much evidence left that men saw the world in which they lived. From Jesus to Robert Burns and Wordsworth, not very much in the record of what impressed men to indicate that they saw or cared for the beautiful world. Read all the writings extant from the time of Jesus through 1600 years, all the theology and the poetry, not much evidence that the world was seen. Who saw a flower in literature from

the time Jesus saw a lily to the time Robert Burns saw a daisy? Volumes there are about sin and doctrine, the war in heaven, the fall of angels, a prince of darkness and a three compartment world beyond, all in detail. Volumes there are depreciating the world that now is to set forth to greater advantage streams of living water and trees of life which eye hath not yet seen, but little about the beautiful world here and now. As no writer saw it as a theme worthy of him, so busy about what all men then thought diviner things and views, so, no artist saw it. Not beautiful things here were to be painted and chiseled, but theological things; not landscapes which men had seen but celestial vistas which men had not seen. Celestial beings, weird creatures of the imagination, things devilish and divine, gory scenes, wounds, crosses, agonies, these men painted and carved and wrote about. Men's eyes were riveted to these; did not see God's beautiful world and their writers and artists did not help them much for they did not see it. It was a blind world. For them God had adorned the world in vain. A world hung in black would have served all their needs as well.

Then came a few men whose eyes were opened. The scales, theological scales, fell and they received their sight. What they saw they wrote and other men read and saw it too. The genius of the world which had long treated the world here as unworthy, began to see that what God hath made is not common or unclean, but beautiful in its time; as beautiful as any other part of his world anywhere. The genius of the world began to portray the glories of the world about us here.

Ruskin looked about him at his country and the people of his generation. The first thing he said was to open their eyes that they might see the wondrous things which they were not seeing. "We respect the lucent glass which we have made, but not the lucent clouds; we weave beautiful embroidered robes but have not considered the heavens the work of His fingers."

He saw what men of his day were doing to this beautiful world they had not seen. That was the great mystery of life to him. He saw the world as a beautiful house and grounds and its inhabitants as children at a May party. Inside the house and out is the lavish provision of a generous and artistic host. There are beautiful gardens, all kinds of flowers, sweet grassy banks for rest, pleasant streams and woods and rocky places for climbing. He saw the children divide into groups and fight in the flower beds. He noted that the real world had so arranged its wars as to fight in the midst of the most precious and beautiful things. And the children in the house, with music to dance to, every kind of book and a museum of curious things to look at, soon tired of these things. They fixed their eyes on the brass-headed nails in the chairs, and forgot all else, so absorbed they became in seeing how many they could pull out. They made collections; counted and compared: spent the whole afternoon doing this, knowing well that they could not take one brass-headed nail home with them. This was the great mystery of life to him.

He saw the commercial and industrial absorption of his nation and the desecration of the beautiful world. He saw the face of the earth marred; the hills and streams dishonored; the sweet air infected with poison and the tender grass burned with fire. "A shame of misery and luxury is spread over the land that gives the lie to the song, 'Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.' " The England which is to be mistress of half the earth, he warned, cannot herself remain a cinder heap, trampled by armies and a miserable crowd. She must return and be as she was once, secluded, pure; her sky polluted by no unholy clouds. Her men must see the stars and guide the human arts if they would gather knowledge and transform the savage to manhood. Ruskin, too, saw London as these other counselors, to whom we have listened, saw it. As they were outraged by the evil and the ignorance so he was outraged by the sight of London. A man not given to sentiment and not an artist told him, he said, that he had to keep his eyes closed while coming into the city in the morning lest the sight of the blocks of miserable houses unfit him for his day's work. This mobilized and concentrated ugliness in the centers of population and industry, he thought, hurts not only sensitive people but all people. It does something to people although unconscious that they are hurt and unconscious of what has hurt them. He told his England that no right morality, no happiness, no beautiful arts are possible while cities are thus built clotted and coagulated, blotches over the country they consume. "You must have lovely cities, crystallized, not

coagulated into form, limited in size, not casting out the scum of them but girded with gardens of blossoming trees and softly girded streams."

Ruskin felt in a large measure what all have felt in a degree, the raw and seamy side of progress. All have seen the beautiful places they have loved taken for factories, tracks and unsightly houses; all have seen the hills stripped; the streams and falls diverted and polluted. We all have said that the price is high and civilization should give us something magnificent in return for such treasures as these taken for her ends. Ruskin the young man, the dreamer, the lover of the beautiful, the artist, articulates what many have felt and would have said.

But as he looked more closely he saw that while God's beautiful world is given, man's beautiful world must be acquired. It is something man must win. The artist gives way to the political economist and the preacher. The highest reach for art, he believed, is to portray the noblest human form. Man is God's best handiwork and to represent him truly is the finest of the fine arts. Better than to chisel or paint Pan or Apollo, angels or any mythical or celestial being, is to chisel and paint the form of a real man or woman. There is a political economy of art. The way to begin is to get clean and beautiful people. "The art of a nation is the best index of its morality. Great arts have for their object the support and exaltation of human life." He said that people must be good before they can paint or have beautiful people to paint. This love of beautiful things is inherent in people and it must be called out. Our

world must be so managed by us as to call it out and, called out, it will in turn react mightily on the world. As there is a spirit in the bird which teaches it to build heroically and beautifully, so there is a spirit in man which, called out, will teach him whatever noble arts and lovely deeds are possible for him.

Ruskin, the political economist and the preacher of the right way to live, made clear to us what should be the aim of all our business; told us what with all our getting we should get. The business of civilization is to make noble, beautiful human beings and no matter what else we are doing, we are doing nothing that matters if we are not doing that. If man decays and he alone is vile, then with all our stir we are not moving. To desecrate England with factories and cover her with a pall of smoke, has no justification unless out of all the dreary waste there emerges the human being, better, happier, more beautiful as the reward for this desecration of the earth. The greatest city, the greatest nation, must be that city and that nation with the most noble and beautiful human beings in them. This was worth saying for this must be the true perspective and the end of civilization. By what can we gauge but this to know whether we are going back, marking time or going on?

What is the way out of the ugliness which desecrates the earth and does something to people? It is answered that mechanism, steam, grinding, the whole new industrial order have done this. Ruskin saw bitter fruit only from these very things named oftenest to indicate our advance. The place we

should reach is not in the midst of this mechanical world nor through it to something on the other side. It is back; back to a quieter order of the world, better suited to making noble men, such as men lived before these mechanical things came upon them. What is the gain? The country is deafened with spinning wheels, but people are not clothed; black with digging fuel, yet not warm; have sold their souls for gain, yet are hungry. These very things which it was thought would bring us freedom and make us rich have enslaved us and made us poor. He would save civilization by getting rid of mechanism. "Beautiful life cannot come by grinding; only dust comes from grinding."

Some definite proposals are offered. The factory must give way to hand-work so that the artist in man can be discovered and recovered; so that men can express beauty in their work. Steam should give way to natural forces; we should never do anything with steam that we can do with stream and water-fall, or use iron where wood will serve. We have substituted mechanism for skill; the mechanic for the artist; photography for picture and cast-iron for sculpture. This spirit in man that loves the beautiful cannot be called out in men attending a machine in the factory, or in the field. Go back to hand-work. Let men's hands be busy in making first, serviceable things. Let no laces be made until each has a good dress. Let each generation keep all the beautiful things handed down: furniture, tapestry, linen and plate, and add something new. Quit carving things out of snow and build up in each household, and each

family line a few beautiful, serviceable things, wrought with care and skill out of durable stuff. Set men's hands to work building houses in pleasant places; let them be furnished and decorated daintily. Let it not be that one buildeth and another inhabiteth. Let these houses be grouped with some design so that human dwellings may be lovely and not frightful. Bring the stream from the hills; let a fountain play in the midst; let the little brook run uncovered. Nothing you can build over it will do so much for the children as playing by its side.

Ruskin is not alone in his protest. Other men, many of them disciples of his, have rebelled against the ugliness of our work and our life. They mourned the passing out of the world of the old pagan and Greek spirit, which made life, and religion too, things of beauty and of joy. The religion which supplanted paganism made the world better, they think, but grayer. Beauty and color were banished. Life draped in black became a solemn march to the tomb. Some of the poets protested; said to religion, "Give us back our beautiful world"; asked why be ugly Christians when we could be beautiful Greeks. We read today of the new paganism. It asks us if it is necessary to be ugly in our life, our civilization and our religion in order to be good and wise. It says to us that we should now take another step. Let us be good; let us have knowledge, and, with it all, let us seek beauty as well. From this revolt has come our modern arts and crafts movement which urges us to recover the lost skill of our hands and perfect our tastes by making needful and decorative things.

Anatole France would call back into life the inspired workmen who made the glass windows and built the cathedrals. He thinks the church has out-tigered the tiger, but she has one redeeming quality: she helped save beauty to the world. She kept alive the fine arts.

We have a spirit in the world still which asks why this waste. Do beautiful buildings to sit in and look at, beautiful windows, carved, painted and chiseled things, do these feed or clothe any one? These who counsel us to beautify the world, bid us look at these things again and consider. Has the race ever spent its substance for anything that has done more for civilization than these things which bake no bread? Can economists compute with their yard stick what service these things have done? Will they be heard to say that such things do not make for life?

Perhaps this is just the thing we need most in our world. We are a new civilization just released from elemental things and the hard necessities. Our morality is better than our taste. Our world which we have built is more solid than beautiful. We are wiser than we are artistic. Our moral shortcomings and our ignorance shame us more than our ugliness. We are stirred more by reformers and schoolmasters than by those who berate us for our unsightliness. We have been a nation of churches and schools. Goodness and knowledge have occupied us wholly. Now we should begin to emerge, and add ugliness to the things which shame us and beauty to the things which we seek. There are signs that this new need

is being felt. In the early days of our country, men left their money for theological schools to make people good and the public approved that; then to found schools and libraries and the public approved that. Now we are beginning to approve great fortunes spent to leave us beautiful things to look at or to preserve some beautiful spot of earth; beginning to approve public expenditure for these things. These do something to us and we can spend our money profitably for them.